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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA IMMEDIATE 0068  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE 3496  
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH IMMEDIATE 0786  
RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 002273

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT AND INSURGENTS AGREE ON FORMAL PEACE  
TALKS

REF: MANILA 2253 (GOVERNMENT MINDANAO REBELS PREPARE  
FOR MORE INFORMAL TALKS)

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Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Taking another step forward for peace in the southern Philippines, the Philippine government and rebel group peace panels signed an agreement October 27 in Kuala Lumpur on the protection of civilian populations in armed conflict and set tentative dates for resuming formal peace talks before the end of the year. In the agreement, the government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) pledged to refrain from attacking noncombatants and civilian facilities should sporadic fighting break out, and to provide relief to conflict-affected communities. Details of the agreement would be addressed during formal peace talks, which could resume in late November or early December. The two sides also agreed at the meeting to invite the UK, Japan, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, as well as two international non-governmental groups, to join the International Contact Group (ICG), a mechanism to show international support for the peace talks. The MILF preferred a smaller ICG, but retained the option for a second batch of invitations to Norway, Finland, and New Zealand. Reflecting the MILF's unease about the immense political weight of the U.S. and the role of the U.S. military in Mindanao, the MILF declined to extend an ICG invitation to the U.S. END SUMMARY.

PARTIES AGREE TO PROTECT CIVILIANS  
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12. (C) The Philippine government and Mindanao rebel group Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) signed an agreement October 27 during informal talks in Kuala Lumpur on protecting Mindanao's civilian populations from the dangers of armed conflict. In the agreement, the parties pledged to refrain from attacking noncombatants and civilian facilities -- such as schools, hospitals, and religious premises -- and to provide relief to conflict-affected communities regardless of their religious or political affiliations. While not articulated in this brief agreement, Philippine Peace Panel Director Ryan Sullivan said the parties envisioned the creation of a new team of international and local non-governmental groups to verify instances of non-compliance with international humanitarian law -- a role distinct from that of the International Monitoring Team (IMT), whose job is to monitor ceasefire violations. To lock in the day's progress, both parties agreed with the Malaysian facilitator's suggestion that details of the civilian protection mechanism be worked out at a later date, in

conjunction with the renewal of the IMT mandate, under which the civilian protection mechanism would be subsumed.

#### SHOWING FLEXIBILITY IN CORDIAL TALKS

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13. (C) During the negotiations, which Sullivan characterized as "cordial," the parties showed flexibility in their demands, ultimately enabling the success of the one-day talks. According to Sullivan, the government panel did not oppose the MILF's desire to limit the first batch of invitations for the International Contact Group (ICG) to only four countries -- UK, Japan, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia -- as well as two NGOs, the Geneva-based Center for Humanitarian Dialogue and The Asia Foundation. The parties agreed to issue formal invitations for the ICG following confidential consultations with those countries' ambassadors and NGO representatives in Manila. A second batch of invitations might include Finland, New Zealand, and Norway, which serves as the facilitator for the GRP peace talks with the communist insurgents of the National Democratic Front. The MILF compromised on its demand to bring foreign law enforcement officers to Mindanao (Ref A), acknowledging the GRP's concerns about bringing new state actors into Mindanao. The MILF also agreed to the GRP's request to subsume the civilian protection mechanism under renewed terms of reference for the IMT, thereby addressing the government's concerns about redundant or competing guidelines for the IMT and civilian protection.

#### MILF DECLINES TO INVITE THE U.S. TO THE ICG

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14. (C) Although the parties discussed a role for the U.S. on  
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the ICG, Sullivan said the MILF ultimately did not want to extend the invitation, possibly out of concern that U.S. participation would be a "double-edged sword." The U.S. could enhance the work of the ICG through our knowledge about and support for Mindanao's Muslims, but our presence could also complicate the work of the ICG because of our sheer political weight and the presence of U.S. military in Mindanao. The MILF's decision not to invite the U.S. came as a surprise to Philippine Peace Panel Chairman Rafael Seguis, who, Sullivan said, thought that Malaysian facilitator Datu Othman was exploring the possibility of a U.S. role.

#### TENTATIVE DATE, AGENDA FOR FORMAL TALKS

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15. (C) Having succeeded in signing the ICG and civilian protection agreements, Sullivan said that the parties tentatively agreed to resume formal peace talks in late November or early December. The agenda for the talks would include an exchange of drafts on a final peace agreement, the renewal and expansion of the IMT's terms of reference (to include terms for the civilian protection mechanism), and the renewal of guidelines for the joint GRP-MILF policing entity, known as the Ad-Hoc Joint Action Group.

#### COMMENT

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16. (C) The prospect of formal talks before the end of the year points to a renewed sense of trust between the parties, as well as to the urgency of starting negotiations before the country becomes consumed by turbulent campaign politics prior to the May 2010 election. Although the parties have not fleshed out the details of their agreements on the ICG and civilian protection mechanism, they seem no less enthusiastic about their progress. Aided by their flexible approaches to informal talks and a steady ceasefire in central Mindanao, the parties have succeeded -- for now -- in rebuilding some of the mutual trust that was lost when a territorial agreement collapsed in August 2008. Still, it remains

unknown how the MILF will leverage the ICG in its negotiations with the government, and if their vision of the role of the ICG conforms closely enough to the government's vision. MILF friend and researcher Professor Abhoud Linga of the Institute of Bangsamoro Studies, in an October 27 email applauding the signing of the civilian protection agreement, stated that the ICG will "guarantee" the Philippine government's compliance with signed agreements. The government, however, has repeatedly emphasized to the MILF that, as far as Philippine law is concerned, there can be no guarantees when constitutional processes might be involved in carving out a final peace deal.

KENNEY